

12-29-87 #2

Dear Harold:

After I prepared a letter for you and was ready to mail it, I remembered I had wanted to tell you about a telephone call and bookmanuscript from Melanson on MLK's assassination.

He asked me to keep it all confidential as he was attempting to secure a publisher--Praeger. So I have. But I suggested in strong terms that he contact you for several of the points. I do not know if he has or did or will do such a thing which would be invaluable for him as I read the manuscript.

Essentially this is the scenario. Right in the middle of my busiest time in early November as I was attempting to clear the deck of work and these extra-curricular energy sappers so that I could arrange a long letter to you on JFK, Phil called and asked me if I would read his manuscript. It appears that Praeger took in the typescript and sent it to a reviewer who gave it the highest praise. They told him so. Then instead of a contract he was sent a letter stating that the editor felt he should get a second opinion before submitting it to his board. Then shortly he got a reader's opinion through the mail--anonymous--that tore the manuscript to pieces. Melanson figured out by internal evidence that this had to be Garrow. The attack was vicious ranging from frontal assault on the facts, on Phil's scholarship, to assertion that he, the reviewer, was an authority on the murder and that . . . He needed another reviewer and after consulting with Stone (?) asked me to do it. So what could I do?

The manuscript has many good qualities and is written in clear terms focusing on three things: Ray before the assassination; the assassination and the evidentiary base connecting it to Ray; and the immediate aftermath with attention to intelligence services.

I remarked to him that the first part did not stress, or for that matter mention, the anti-war, anti-poverty, pro-reform of the social system, etc. of King's background and immediately to Memphis. (A few fleeting references to poverty appeared.) Also the Memphis scene ought to be examined more closely. I gave him Jerry McKnight's articles, the last and best he had not heard of, but which fit his thesis to a tee. By indirection I hoped Jerry's scholarly apparatus would be conveyed to him, for Melanson merely cites the original files and does not provide the more elaborate form of the notes that "scholars" like to chew over and praise in their mindless ways. I trust he will contact Jerry.

On the murder itself he is fairly responsible. Except. His ballistic section is appropriate enough to cast reasonable doubt on the official conclusions, but he lacks the tough analytic examination in terms of the science of ballistics to carry out doubters or even convince the average reader. He agreed he would toughen it, be more clear, check out such things as the swabbing and so forth--I mentioned ~~heavily~~ strongly that he speak with you.

I of course am no expert or even reasonable factual critic of King's murder, but I think I assisted him in strengthening some areas. I convinced him to drop a chapter on an Andrews suspect that was simply non relevant. I also suggested he provide a discursive essay in his bibliography pointing out some of the literature's strengths and weaknesses, especially showing that Garrow is not an authority on the assassination itself.

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It is unfortunate that he did not place King in his proper context for the murder and he informed me he would attempt to redress that area. Also he should at least in the notes make references to the same m.o. operating among the FBI and CIA and other areas of the country--Minute men, etc. For example his references to FBI informers should have noted similar operations round the country, to give the reader more assurance that this actually happened and is not the special plea of a critic.

I think your book on King will be most essential now to put this subject to rest. As you might surmise I did not provide Melanson with any of your confidentially disclosed information.

He has done a prodigious amount of research on RAY's background, on Canada, on intelligence operations. But he lacks the focus on the central issues it seems to me that is incumbent on the subject

Again

David

My first book on the investigation of the assassination of President Kennedy, completed mid-February 1965, was runner-up for the mystery-writers award the next year. However, there is but a single source in that book that is not an official record. It is an AP story reporting the comment of two members of the Warren Commission about the FBI. There is mystery, considerably mystery and dissatisfaction over the official solutions to the political assassinations of the 1960s - and there should be. This is because those most subversive of crimes were never investigated officially, as will become clear and will be without reasonable question.

However, the writing about these crimes and these failures of all the basic institutions of our society, should be not be done as mysteries. "One of my seven books has been, despite consideration of the first for the mystery-writers award.

Treating these subversive crimes and institutional failures as mysteries has been a curse of the literature. Whatever inspires them, and publishers prefer the approach because it is commercially more promising, they have served to protect the institutional failures and those who failed personally and to confuse the public.

No matter how serious and sincere these theorizers have been, they have been or have been used as disinformation.

It is not to avoid this trap that what would ordinarily be the ending of a book comes early in this one. Rather is it that on this subject matter, which gets to the essences of free, representative society, commercial considerations ought not be a factor and because this book, as the seven which preceded it, are studies of how our basic institutions functioned or failed to function in those times of great stress and since then.

For the reader's understanding, therefore, what might ordinarily be regarded as the "solution" to the mystery of the King assassination appears early, with

detail, documentation and explanation ~~is~~ following it.

This is not to say, however, that no secrets, no mystery, appears at the end. But again, this is not as a literary device. It is for context and comprehensibility and so that the reader is in a better position to make an informed evaluation.

Our system of justice was corrupted on two levels, official and commercial, the latter by a book contract compromising the supposed defense lawyer. The official corrupting is a major part of this book.

The prestigious writer, the later William Bradford Huie, decided, with the kind of instant vision the late J. Edgar Hoover has boasted in these political assassinations, that James Earl Ray was the lone assassin of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Huie contracted with the late Arthur Hanes, Sr., to pay him for the literary rights to James Earl Ray and his story. This saddled Hanes with an irreconcilable conflict of interest and it kept Ray, despite all the contrary publicity, for which Huie is largely responsible, from getting so much as a penny for the literary rights and for any use he might want to make.

Huie promoted himself with a story in a newspaper weekly supplement featuring a phony check on the cover, his nonexistent check for \$35,000 to James Earl Ray. Huie paid only Hanes, until he also bought the most eminent and successful criminal lawyer of the era, Percy Foreman, who cost Huie less money but served his corrupting purposes even better.

There is a simple question those of us who write nonfiction ought ask ourselves - does this make sense?

Huie, of no Olympian ego, either did not ask himself this question or reached a conclusion that is not rational or reasonable and makes no sense at all.

Huie is not alone. The FBI did not ask itself this question. I know because under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) I sued it and got what it represents is all of its records relating to the crime and its investigation of the crime